Approved for Release: 2018/10/02 C03006948

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The National Intelligence Daily

Published by the Director of Central Intelligence for Named Principals Only

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3.5(c)

Copy No. 261

MONDAY DECEMBER 13, 1976 VOLUME 3, NUMBER 290

~~TOP SECRET~~

3.5(c)

Approved for Release: 2018/10/02 C03006948

Approved for Release: 2018/10/02 C03006948

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Argentina: Differences Within Junta

The navy and air force members of Argentina's ruling military junta are expressing increased dissatisfaction with what they view as inordinate army influence. Navy chief Admiral Massera in particular is indulging even more than usual his penchant for sniping at President Videla, commander in chief of the army.

Massera and his air force counterpart, General Agosti, are both generally identified with the so-called hard-line current of opinion; they may be reacting defensively to Videla's move to retire some of the army's more outspoken members of that group.

At least three such army generals have been placed at the disposition of the army general staff, normally the first step in the retirement process. The heightened sensitivity of Massera and Agosti could spring from their fear of becoming isolated as a result of the imminent departure of like-minded army colleagues.

In the past week or so, Massera has directed thinly veiled public criticism at the President and his chief ally, army chief of staff General Roberto Viola.

Junta members (L to R) Admiral Massera, President Videla, General Agosti

Massera may see some possibility that by discrediting Videla, he himself could emerge as president, a job he covets.

Chances are slim that Massera can, in the near future, engineer Videla's departure; it is even less likely that he could become president himself. The army is well-established as the predominant service, and there is no evidence of active plotting within the army against the President.

Indeed, Videla's move to retire generals who do not agree with his moderate tactics, though the cause of some grumbling, is not being obstructed. Army officers, however disgruntled they may become with Videla, are hardly likely to assist the opportunistic Massera to gain power.

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